

RE: House Bill #

Good morning committee chairmen and members. My name is Trevor Furrer and I am one of the partners of The Riverhouse at Goodspeed Station in Haddam.

I am here to offer testimony in support of Bill # ____.

The history of this proposed land exchange dates back to 2006 when then DEP Deputy Commissioner David Leff first proposed the idea of trading other land for the 17 acre parcel surrounding The Riverhouse. Mr. Leff explained to us that DEP really had not wanted to acquire this land, but it was part of the purchase of the 16 riverfront acres which they did want. He told the Riverhouse partners that DEP had no plans for this Industrial land, which surrounds the Riverhouse on 3 sides, had no budget for it, and if land was identified that was more useful to DEP, they would like to do an exchange.

In June 2007, after construction of the Riverhouse was completed, then DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy visited our site and suggested the same thing, saying she did not believe in "land-banking" for its own sake, but preferred that the State have parks people could use.

At this point the Riverhouse partners began looking for property which would be attractive to DEP, and in 2009 entered into a contract to purchase a tract of land which would extend the Cockaponset State forest to Route 81 in Higganum. We proposed exchanging this land with DEP, as well as riverfront land in East Haddam offered by the Goodspeed Opera House. DEP staff walked the property and approved the proposal, as did Commissioner McCarthy. INSERT HOW WE WENT DOWN BOTH TIMES- GINA LEFT JODI VETOED This proposal represents "Smart Growth" because the 87 acre tract of land has been previously approved for a 33 home subdivision which would tax the school system and town services. Instead it would be preserved for the enjoyment of all the residents of Connecticut.

The 17 acres offers development potential that could add over one hundred thousand dollars in local property tax and potentially millions in State business, income and sales taxes. Hundreds of construction and permanent jobs would be created. Existing businesses in Haddam, East Haddam and other towns would receive a much needed boost with the increase in tourism and recreational spending, including by area residents. This proposal is highly advantageous for both economic as well as environmental reasons. The original proposed exchange for the 17 acres around the Riverhouse was for 54 acres of the Higganum forest land + 2? acres of land owned by the Goodpseed Opera House. The language in the current bill references the Goodspeed as a part of this exchange and we

would ask the committee to remove that language as the Goodspeed no longer has any involvement in this exchange.

The opposition to this exchange in past years has mostly been about the process and factual misconceptions. Examples include: The exchange gave Riverhouse riverfront property (it doesn't and never has), It was a "backroom deal" (we originally followed the process as laid out to us by DEP. Certainly by now, 3 years later, the entire process is transparent). The exchange is not an equal trade (State hired independent appraisals of both tracts of land showed the Riverhouse piece as being worth \$200k more than the DEP piece). Of course new appraisals would have to be undertaken and we all recognize that the citizens of the state must get equal or greater value in any exchange. Prior to the State's purchase of the land, the Haddam Economic Development Commission specifically identified this part of town (known as Tylerville) as best suited for economic development- given its easy access to Route 9, high traffic volume, nearby businesses and attractions (Goodspeed Opera House, Devil's Hopyard State Park, Gillette Castle to name a few). But this exchange is not just about the economic benefits but also the environmental benefits to all CT residents. One of the reasons we have the broad support of the environmental community (Haddam Conservation Commission, Haddam Wetlands Commission, CT State Forester) is because of the changes made this time around to the exchange. The Goodspeed Opera House is no longer involved so their riverfront property is off the table. As a result, we are offering our entire 87 acres in exchange for the 17 acres. The 87 acre tract of virgin forest would be preserved rather than developed into 33 or more homes (a previously approved sub-division) and the associated municipal costs (schools, town services, road maintenance, etc.) The parcel will create a greenway connecting the Haddam Land Trust Cedar Hill Preserve in Higganum through Cockaponset State Forest. Preserving the forest canopy will help protect groundwater, and give DEP and the community access to the State Forest from Rt. 81. Following Commissioner McCarthy's stated intentions; the State would then have land much more usable for ALL citizens of Connecticut.

I strongly urge the committee to approve this land exchange and I appreciate the opportunity to testify.